

UNITED WISDOM

Nihilism: when former grounds stop convincing

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

P08 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Nihilism: when former grounds stop convincing

Epigraph

> *God is dead! God remains dead!*

Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom, §125, spoken by the character in The Madman. Thomas Common translation (1910). Context.

What this article is about

When a former story stops convincing, it is tempting to say it was all empty. Yet rejecting one mission, questioning grounds for values and lacking an immediate direction are different questions. This article considers nihilism through lost credibility and a wider denial of value, without making the word a diagnosis or a description of everyone who doubts. A hypothetical education project shows how criticism of a promise can expand unnoticed into a verdict against all participation. Brief references to Nietzsche, Ecclesiastes and the Dhammapada preserve their different frameworks and help prevent one sombre phrase being read as an entire teaching's conclusion. No universal exit or immediate optimism is demanded. The aim is to name what lost its force, which conclusion has grounds and what remains unknown.

I. Losing a ground and denying value

An explanation may stop convincing before another becomes available. Someone no longer believes that a job title determines worth, that success necessarily confirms the right path, or that an organisation serves what it advertises. This matters, but the change still needs to be named. Rejecting one account differs from claiming that no values have any ground. Here nihilism is considered primarily through that denial and the situation in which familiar grounds lose their force. Every doubting person is not called a nihilist. The word is not made a personality description, nor is a philosophical position inferred from a bad mood. We first need to understand the conclusion and the reasons offered for it.

Imagine an employee of a small education project. She joined to support access to learning, then noticed that attractive reporting mattered more than actual help for students. This is a hypothetical scene, not a description of a company. Her question may sound harsh: it was all deception. Yet several claims lie inside it. Reports may genuinely conceal shortcomings. Particular promises may be false. At the same time, help received by some students does not automatically disappear. Inquiry separates those facts from a conclusion that education itself

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

has no value. The strength of disappointment cannot establish the scope of a proof. Precision also does not require defending the project: it supports a concrete criticism that cannot be dissolved into discussion of her mood.

The word has different philosophical and historical uses, and a short article cannot replace that history. Three distinctions are useful here: criticism of one ground, a wider refusal to recognise grounds for values, and an experience of losing familiar direction. They can intersect without being identical by definition. A person may challenge a social norm because another value matters deeply. They may reject religious justification while holding moral convictions. They may retain faith while lacking a clear direction. These possibilities do not settle whether objective values exist. They prevent that dispute from being closed in advance by a label that turns different positions into one and impoverishes conversation.

II. A famous denial has a context

In The Joyful Wisdom, Thomas Common’s translation of the work often called The Gay Science, Nietzsche gives the epigraph’s words to the character in §125, The Madman. He addresses people who already disbelieve and speaks of a lost horizon. Section 343 considers consequences when Christian belief loses credibility for European grounds. This is a philosophical cultural question, not a medical description or a short proof for or against God. The distinction is between abandoning belief and understanding what had depended on it.

A similar structure appears at a smaller scale in our scene, without claiming that a company repeats European history. The employee no longer trusts the ceremonial mission, yet decisions about time, money, relationships and pride were attached to it. Rejecting an advertising phrase does not automatically release every connection. What should continue now, and on what grounds? This does not demand restoring trust at any cost. Restoration may be impossible or unnecessary. It helps, however, to distinguish the failed formula from actual commitments that remain. Otherwise doubt about words quietly becomes permission to stop seeing people affected by the work, although that conclusion requires its own justification.

A question can be drawn cautiously without assigning our practical example wholesale to Nietzsche: which habitual conclusions depended on a ground that stopped convincing? For the employee, these might include believing that overtime always serves a good, a high score proves usefulness, or a manager may define the limits of her participation. Each claim needs separate examination. Losing the larger story does not make every smaller conclusion equally false. Nor does preserving some useful activity justify deception. This takes time because it provides no convenient final verdict. It does identify where a former connection broke, without making the word nihilism answer every question.

III. Impermanence is not worthlessness

Another route to total denial says that if a result will not last forever, there is no reason to act for it. That sentence contains an extra condition: only the eternal can have value. This is not simply an observation about time; it too needs grounds. A lesson ends, a meal is eaten, a conversation forgotten, and help sometimes remains unnamed. Those facts alone do not establish that nothing happened or mattered. The ultimate meaning of a brief action can be disputed, but a result's duration and an action's value are different questions. The substitution is especially visible when ordinary work must provide eternal confirmation, although no such requirement is imposed on one's own request for help today.

Chapter XX of the Dhammapada, in Max Müller's translation, places impermanence alongside a path and effort. In the passage read, reflection on what passes does not remove every direction: requirements for action and the religious aim of liberation remain. This Buddhist framework is not identical to a Christian ground or Nietzsche's argument. Nor should an older translation become a modern psychological law. The comparison shows something more limited: speaking of impermanence within a tradition does not necessarily mean that everything is indifferent.

The employee need not prove that one course is eternal; she needs to understand its actual limits. Some students acquired a particular skill, while others did not receive promised support. These outcomes can be discussed without making the project immortal or wholly empty. A limited useful effect does not remove responsibility for a false promise, and it does not make a received skill worthless. Precision need not bring relief: disappointment may become more substantial. She can now identify gratitude, objection and what she will no longer support. Several claims capable of evidence, disagreement and decision replace one enormous denial. They do not replace philosophy, but prevent a philosophical word from hiding the concrete situation.

IV. A failed promise does not erase its recipient

When an attractive ground collapses, it is tempting to dismiss those who trusted it as naive and stop answering to them. In our scene they include students, colleagues and the employee's earlier self. Yet a false promise does not turn its recipients into scenery. Someone paid, allocated time or declined another opportunity. The old mission need not be accepted to identify these events. A later decision can consider them: help hand work over, communicate actual limits, approach a responsible person or end participation appropriately. The option depends on real conditions. This article does not know them and cannot issue universal instructions for resignation, complaints or performing a contract.

Responsibility does not mean an endless duty to stay. Otherwise the old ground merely changes clothes: endurance once served the mission, and now must prove personal goodness. Recognising that others are affected can coexist with discussing the limits of a role. The employee is not required to compensate personally for every management decision. Yet a limited role does not make her words and actions consequence-free. The distinction between limited responsibility and complete indifference matters especially after disappointment. It permits rejecting an excessive demand while retaining concrete questions about promises, handover and information one may communicate. Particular legal questions require their own sources and help, not a philosophical metaphor.

Even a decision to continue nothing should be named more precisely. It may be a refusal to support unreliable messages, an inability to work under former conditions, or a wish to enter another activity. None automatically means believing that education is meaningless. Refusal can protect a value that the former organisation violated. Denial then concerns a form of participation rather than every meaning. It need not look cheerful or confident. Someone can lack a plan and doubt the next step while clearly recognising what they will no longer do. This clarity is limited but real. It need not be discounted because it has not yet become a new large story.

V. Criticism also relies on distinctions

The claim that everything is deception invites a question: what distinguishes deception from honest communication? If that distinction still matters, criticism retains a ground for evaluation. This is no quick logical trick refuting every philosophical form of nihilism. A speaker may explain evaluations differently and deny their objective status. In practical conversation, however, we need to know what they regard as violated. The employee is not upset by random unattractive reporting; she notices a gap between promised and delivered support. Her objection already contains a question about honesty. It can be clarified without demanding prior agreement with an entire moral system, or making one objection prove a universal law for everyone.

Honesty needs specificity too. What information was available? Who knew the limitations? Which message reached the student? What did a score presented as an outcome actually mean? These are not bureaucratic evasions of the larger issue. They keep an argument from being replaced by general contempt. Unknown facts remain unknown. An established breach is named. Several possible readings of a promise are considered. Attention neither automatically restores trust nor guarantees a fair outcome. It helps distinguish substantial criticism from a habit of rejecting everything before encountering evidence. That habit can close the possibility of learning, because any clarification appears in advance as defending someone’s wrongdoing rather than asking an independent question.

Sometimes a person genuinely wants a broad philosophical discussion rather than an examination of a report. They should not be forced back into the workplace example. The existence of objective values has arguments of its own; disappointment does not exhaust them. Different scales of conversation can be recognised, and the present one agreed. The employee may discuss both convictions and the organisation without being required to settle them simultaneously. A discussion of moral grounds can remain open while a handover agreement already requires an answer. This does not reduce philosophy's seriousness. It allows philosophy its place without becoming an excuse to defer every concrete responsibility or a tool for suppressing doubt.

An error, an exaggeration and deliberate concealment also differ. The hypothetical employee may presently lack information about the report writer's intentions. This does not remove the gap with the promise, but limits a conclusion about why it arose. Incorrect information can require correction without every suspected motive being declared established. A substantial objection can also remain after some circumstances are acknowledged as unknown. This guarantees no satisfactory conversation. It keeps claims proportionate to information: a fact remains a fact, a supposition a supposition, and a philosophical conclusion does not fill an evidential gap. Disagreeing with one message then does not require deciding in advance whether anyone at all deserves trust.

VI. Sombre wisdom does not always deny grounds

Ecclesiastes opens with questions about fragile human outcomes, while the concluding chapter read retains a religious demand to answer before God. Reducing it to a modern assertion that nothing has value would therefore misrepresent it. Its tension cannot be removed by a simple promise of optimism either. The article compares the first and last chapters in KJV rather than interpreting the entire biblical work. Christian, Jewish and other readers may discuss it within different traditions; no single reading is made obligatory for everyone here.

Similar words can express different grounds. Someone calls labour futile because a particular goal lacks credibility, because human control is limited, because all values seem conditional, or because today is especially tiring. The alternatives are not established by a phrase's elegance. They become clearer by asking what is asserted and what could change the understanding. If no possible event can affect the general verdict, its closed form deserves notice. This proves neither illness nor a false position. It describes a conversation in which clarification has been excluded in advance. For discussing a concrete activity, that closure matters: facts cease to participate in evaluation and people become confirmation of a verdict already written.

Remaining open does not require believing every promise. The employee can request information, reject unreliable work and withhold another advance of trust. Room for

clarification differs from credulity. It permits an event not yet known and another person who may answer differently from expectation. Even refusal becomes more precise when it has grounds and limits rather than describing everyone forever. General distrust may seem protective, but this is an editorial observation, not an established psychological mechanism. No claim is made that an open conversation is always safe or useful. Under actual conditions, a person determines the available form of contact and may decline it.

VII. New certainty need not arrive immediately

After a former ground is rejected, others sometimes demand an immediate replacement. If you no longer believe in the project, what do you believe now? The question can be sincere but becomes pressure when lacking a ready story supposedly invalidates the refusal. A concrete violation remains a violation even if the employee has no new career or systematic philosophy. She may know the reason for leaving well and the next route poorly. These are different kinds of knowledge. A gap need not be filled with an attractive mission merely to make doubt socially acceptable. Temporary uncertainty need not become a new ideal; it can have a limited place alongside concrete questions of living.

Uncertainty does not remove everyday conditions: budget, time, relationships, commitments and opportunities to request help. Considering them cannot establish life’s ultimate meaning, but avoids requiring the larger question to prepare a schedule or pay a bill. In our scene the employee can examine separately the time available for a transition, what needs clarification and what support could be requested. This is neither financial advice nor a universal exit scheme. It illustrates scale: concrete facts need concrete consideration. Attending to them does not make someone less thoughtful. Philosophical doubt also gives others no right to decide material matters for them, as though ordinary life now belongs to whoever first offers a persuasive story.

A small action during such a period should not be advertised as a cure for nihilism. Handing over a document, making food or seeing a friend can have its own grounds without proving the rebirth of every value. An action may fail to bring an expected feeling; it is not automatically meaningless. Postponing it is not automatically defeat. Everyday details should not become tests of philosophical adequacy. The possible significance of a conversation belongs to that conversation and its relationship. It can coexist with an open question about values generally. This article keeps both scales visible and does not promise that distinguishing them correctly must produce new certainty.

VIII. Another person can answer without being assigned conversion

Conversation about lost grounds can become a contest: one person must prove life is wonderful, while the other proves every argument naive. Concrete content then disappears. The employee may need to discuss a false promise and receive a list of good events. Or she asks about objective grounds for values and is told to change jobs. Even a kind reply can miss the question. Naming the subject first can help: a philosophical argument, a specific violation, a decision about a role, or room to describe what happened. This is an editorial agreement, not a validated communication technique. It guarantees no understanding but makes differences explicit and permits declining an answer that was never requested.

Another person need not become the source of an ultimate ground. A friend can acknowledge doubt without sharing total denial. A colleague can confirm a fact without discussing metaphysics. A professional can help within a field without deciding meaning for a client. These roles do not diminish the conversation; they protect it from an excessive task. The alternatives are not complete isolation or handing one’s decision over. A specific contact with stated boundaries is possible. Here it means discussing actual student support with a colleague. The result need not become a new worldview. It may be enough to understand whether information agrees, what remains unknown and which questions each person is willing to consider further.

If someone describes immediate danger, personal unsafety or difficulty meeting daily needs, philosophical reflection cannot replace appropriate help. This is a boundary of the genre, not a conclusion drawn from the word nihilism itself. Doubt must not be presumed illness, and elegant prose must not cancel an actual need for support. The message matters more than its label. An ordinary conversation may also include saying that there is insufficient energy or knowledge for a large dispute. Declining a debate is not rejecting the person. An available, specific contact can be offered if it is actually possible, with its limits stated honestly. The point lies in correspondence between what is said and what the speaker can provide.

IX. After denial, its scope remains a question

Nihilism in the sense selected here cannot be reduced to an unpleasant mood or dismissed with advice to think positively. Grounds for values are a serious question permitting genuine disagreement. A particular disappointment, however, does not answer the whole question. Rejecting a false mission needs examination through facts. Claiming that no education has value requires another argument. Lacking a next step is a third matter. Distinguishing them settles none automatically. It prevents one question being suppressed by an answer to another and the scale of an experience becoming the scale of a proof. Denial can remain serious while being asked to identify its own grounds and limits.

The hypothetical story has no compulsory happy ending. The employee may leave, stay in a changed role or postpone deciding. Whether trust returns or another activity appears is unknown. A more precise account is possible: this promise failed examination; this value remains for me; this condition is unacceptable; this ground is presently unknown. It need not sound triumphant. Its worth lies in each part answering for its own content. Total denial no longer has to represent every unknown and objection simultaneously. A person can preserve refusal where justified and openness where no conclusion has been reached, without calling caution a return to former naivety.

The traditions read provide no single shared instruction for leaving nihilism. Nietzsche, Ecclesiastes and the Buddhist text speak within irreducible frameworks. Their proximity helps reveal how easily a negative phrase can be removed from context, or impermanence confused with indifference. The reader’s own question follows: what stopped convincing, what actually follows, and what remains open? Everything need not be answered today. Inquiry can continue without a promised inevitable result. Precision does not replace a new ground but makes room for discussing one. It permits seeing doubt, concrete people and limits on action without forcing every part of life immediately to confirm or refute the value of all existence.

What this means in practice

Take one statement you recently called disappointment or loss of meaning. This editorial proposal clarifies a question; it is neither treatment nor a validated way of overcoming nihilism. Record the event separately from the conclusion: promised support was not provided; therefore I no longer trust that promise. If the conclusion is wider, state it separately: I see no grounds for valuing education at all. You need not immediately abandon that conclusion. Notice only that it needs arguments of its own.

Ask which facts are known, which unknown and which evaluations remain inside the criticism. You may still distinguish an honest message from deception, or an acceptable condition from an excessive demand. This does not prove an entire moral system. It helps identify a particular

objection. Then note which conversation is needed now: about facts, a role, philosophical grounds or simply the event experienced.

One available form of clarification may be chosen, or no action selected yet. A small step need not restore every ground of life. If the situation concerns immediate safety, daily needs or a specific professional problem, appropriate help has its own place and is not replaced by this text. A possible outcome is modest: one denial has a precise address, and one unknown question no longer appears to be the final answer to everything.

Key quotation

> *You yourself must make an effort.*

Dhammapada, 276, first sentence. Max Müller translation. Text.

Connections between traditions

Shared words do not establish shared grounds.

Distinction	Comparison	Boundary
Refusal and consequences	Nietzsche; editorial scene	A company is not equated with Europe’s history.
Impermanence and indifference	Dhammapada; a brief lesson outcome	The Buddhist path is not reduced to modern psychology.
Futility and answerability	Ecclesiastes; grounds	Religious closing context is retained.
Criticism and evaluation	Three contexts; a student promise	An objection proves no complete moral system.
Uncertainty and participation	Different frames; exercise	Small action is not called a cure for nihilism.

Primary sources

1. Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom, §§125, 343. Thomas Common, 1910; epigraph spoken by the character in §125.

2. Dhammapada, XX. Max Müller; key quotation is verse 276’s first sentence.

3. Ecclesiastes, 1 and 12. KJV; both chapters read, brief paraphrase only.

Russian quotations are original United Wisdom translations from named English editions. Project and exercise are editorial examples.

Tags

nihilism, grounds, value, doubt, denial, disappointment, meaning, direction, conviction, context, impermanence, transience, responsibility, promise, trust, honesty, criticism, participation, uncertainty, philosophy, religion, Nietzsche, Ecclesiastes, Dhammapada, Buddhism, learning, boundaries, facts, conversation, autonomy

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.